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SUBJECT: Seselj's Hunger Strike Increasing Attention for  
the Radicals

REF:

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SUMMARY  
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[11](#). (SBU) The Serbian Radical party is keenly focusing its campaign for parliamentary elections in January on the continuing hunger strike of their leader, Vojislav Seselj, currently on trial in the Hague. As the campaign trail heats up, the Radicals will likely continue to exploit Seselj's latest antics as a way to ramp up a campaign message that is anti-Hague, and anti-West. Despite the surprise NATO announcement on PfP that could complicate the anti-West strategy, and some discord between the leadership in Belgrade and their leader in the Hague, the Radicals are mobilizing throughout the country to gather signatures and stage rallies in support of Seselj and his hateful and anti-Western message. End Summary.

Hunger Strike Garnering Sympathy  
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[12](#). (SBU) Fresh off the controversial death of former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic while in custody at The Hague, Seselj's hunger strike over alleged ICTY mistreatment is again rousing anti-Hague sentiment amongst the populace. Seselj is demanding that the tribunal allow him to chose his own defense council, unrestricted visits from his wife, that all documents submitted to him be in Serbian (not Serbo-Croatian), and the latest, that all his foreign currency assets outside of Serbia, specifically in the US, be unfrozen. Seselj has been on his self-imposed hunger strike for approximately three weeks now in protest. He was moved into the hospital wing of the detention center on November 30--the SRS says against his will--over concerns that his health condition is endangered.

[13](#). (SBU) Seselj is echoing Milosevic's accusation that the Tribunal was set up by secret international agencies, and accusing the US and the west of plotting to kill him. Seselj refused to appear during the first day of his trial on November 27, and therefore lost his right to conduct his own defense. The trial is now adjourned indefinitely because of concerns over Seselj's condition.

[14](#). (SBU) Ljiljiana Smajlovic, editor-in-chief of pro-government daily Politika, stoked the anti-Hague sentiment in a commentary on November 28, asserting the Tribunal was making a mistake by imposing council on Seselj and accusing him of obstructing the trial, a charge she called ludicrous given that he has been waiting four years for his trial to even begin. Smajlovic said that the tribunal is weakening

itself even further in Serbian public opinion by its latest actions.

15. (SBU) Seselj's hunger strike will likely continue to hold the attention of Serbia, both through media, and SRS rallies and booths set up in Belgrade and Serbia-wide to collect signatures in support of Seselj. The Radicals held a rally on November 23 near the parliament building, carrying Seselj's pictures, waving party flags and shouting "Release Seselj." A much larger event was held on Saturday, December 2 in front of the US Embassy, with 20,000-25,000 people showing up carrying banners with pictures of Seselj, Mladic and Milosevic. Speeches by the SRS leadership were hate-filled harangues accusing the U.S. of using the Hague Tribunal to murder its leadership and destroy Serbia. The Radicals also attacked Tadic and Kostunica as U.S. lackeys. Their campaign continued on December 3, with party leaders publicly reading out Seselj's last will and testament, which called on them to never to abandon their ideology of a "Greater Serbia" and to oppose Serbia's entry into NATO and even the EU.

Campaign Theme for the Radicals: The Hague not Kosovo

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16. (SBU) The demonstration in front of the Embassy on December 2 suggests that the SRS is opting to focus on a backward looking anti-Hague, anti-West campaign message instead of responding to the economic frustrations of its base. Because the DSS has already seized Kosovo as their main rallying cry, the SRS has been content to echo and reinforce the PM's hard line on the Kosovo issue. Asked by reporters if the SRS would try and avoid leading the next government in order to blame Tadic and Kostunica for losing Kosovo, Deputy SRS leader Nikolic said he would not accuse

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anyone in Serbia for a bad outcome on Kosovo's final status. "How can I accuse them for a solution that will be passed by Marti Ahtisaari? If the solution is negative, i.e. if Kosovo gains any form of independence or if the present state remains, then that solution will be unacceptable for all of Serbia and it will simply have to react," said Nikolic.

17. (SBU) NATO's surprise decision to invite Serbia to participate in PfP may complicate the Radicals strategy as the announcement has been viewed positively both by the public and by the NGO's that have been strongly supportive of the ICTY. The Radicals have not commented on the PfP decision as of yet and their silence has not been raised by the media or challenged by the other parties. In any event, we expect the Radicals' rhetoric against the West to increase in the weeks leading up to the election. It will be interesting to see how they balance the anti-West themes in their anti-Hague effort with the public's largely positive reaction to PfP membership.

18. (SBU) The party emerged from the Constitutional referendum and the subsequent passage of the Constitutional law, looking very much as winners: they foiled Kostunica's alleged promise to the DS of joint presidential and parliamentary elections before the end of the year and took credit for adding references to the Constitution that strengthened Serbia's national claim on Kosovo. By supporting the referendum, the Radicals enhanced its image as a "nation-building" party, dedicated to defending the country's territory and sovereignty. The media's gingerly treatment of the Radicals and the PM's careful avoidance of any public criticism of their rhetoric, has deepened suspicion among some that SRS, SPS and DSS are reserving their options for some variation on a possible National Unity Government that would bring all parties together in a Serbian government united against an independence outcome in the Kosovo talks.

¶9. (SBU) Most recently, however, the SRS has lashed out at the DSS in reaction to damning testimony in the high-profile trial on the killing of former PM Zoran Djindjic, and accused the government of manipulating a key witness to suggest an SRS hand in Djindjic's death. In its "anger," the SRS publicly claimed it would never join in coalition with the DSS and would only rule alone or in partnership with ethnic Bosniak and Hungarian minority parties, an offer which both flatly refused. The DS exploited the breach by calling on the DSS to declare before the elections which parties they would and would not be in coalition with. The DSS has refused to answer but the SRS continued to attack the DSS and Kostunica in person during its rally over the weekend. The PfP decision and the process that Serbia faces to accept the invitation, will give the DS additional fodder for pushing the DSS to come clean and clarify its electoral plans.

Discord Amongst the Radicals?

¶10. (SBU) Meanwhile, the Radical leadership, including Nikolic and the young ambitious Secretary-General, Alekandar Vucic, are reportedly frustrated with Seselj's antics and heavy handed directives from the Hague. Despite Seselj's reportedly poor condition, our sources tell us Seselj has access to a cell phone and calls his wife and party officials regularly to try to continue organizing the day-to-day activities of the party. The SRS continues to follow Seselj's guidance, support him in The Hague and consult with him on official party business. He is listed first on the party's ballot list which is officially named: "Serbian Radical Party--Vojislav Seselj." However, Nikolic and Vucic reportedly continue to look for ways to circumvent his orders, while still publicly maintaining their fierce loyalty.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) The controversy over Seselj's condition at the beginning of election season will likely provide at least a small boost to the Radicals as they exploit the anti-Hague sentiment already boiling in Serbia. Even with the trial suspended, we expect the Radical's to continue banging on the anti-Hague drum with any worsening in Seselj's condition playing to their advantage. Seselj's personal involvement in the Radicals electoral campaign may backfire: extending their anti-West message even to the EU,

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which the vast majority of Serbs support as the key to Serbia's future is a dangerous tactic that party leaders here have sought to avoid.

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